

Glam without trickery: the truth is ugly

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Magazine photos of women are manipulated in more ways than just digitally.

FOLLOWING the lead of the Liberal Democrats' "Real Women" campaign in Britain, the Victorian government is planning to introduce regulations that would ban advertisers from depicting women in an exploitative or discriminatory way. What that means exactly, and how and by whom it would be determined, remains to be clarified. But part of the proposed legislation includes regulating that advertisements declare when an image has been digitally altered to, say, enhance breast size or reduce waists or thighs.

There are, of course, myriad complexities involved in trying to classify what is "real" and what is not when it comes to representation, even whether such a distinction can be made. But one question around this aspect of the legislation leapt out immediately: why limit the declarations to digital alteration? Why not go the whole kit and caboodle, and demand full disclosure of all forms of artificial manipulation. After all, clever use of lighting, not to mention clever use of Wonderbras, can have as much of an effect on appearances as a bit of digital tidying up.

Remember the uproar last year when *W* magazine was busted digitally trimming an inch or so from Demi Moore's thigh on a cover shot. Such was the hoo-ha, it was easy to forget that there are other parts of Demi that had been altered long before the art director got out his airbrush.

While it took a keen observer to detect Demi's missing flesh, one doesn't need an asterisk and a disclaimer to know that sometime between *Blame It On Rio* (1984) and *Striptease* (1996), someone attached the tyre pumps to Demi and inflated her a notch or two. But where should we draw the line? After all, the purpose of the legislation is said to be related to issues of body image and self-esteem. The end point is the image, but a lot more than a bit of photoshoping goes into making that image.

Why are we so focused on the media, when the world around us is already an endless guessing game as to what is natural and real, and what isn't? Everything from Donald



Trump's hair to Paul Hogan's tax file number, from Kylie Minogue's bum to Jennifer Aniston's latest boyfriend is subjected to the piercing gaze of the "real versus fake" scrutineers.

If, under the new legislation, *W* magazine was required by law to declare "image has been digitally altered", why shouldn't it also be obliged to state, "Demi Moore's breasts have been surgically enhanced"? Or perhaps, "objects in picture may appear closer than they actually are".

Of course, we're not just talking breasts and hips and waists. There's Botox and collagen, false lashes, make-up, lighting, Vaseline and masking tape, and all the other tricks and techniques that photographers use to make a Big Mac look like food. It could all get quite personal and embarrassing for the models concerned. "Model's buttocks taped, teeth coated in lacquer, belly button is really an 'outy', etc, etc."

It would be impossible for an ad to list all the specific ways an image has been "altered", so it is likely that the advertising industry would just produce a simple, cover-all statement that the image has been manipulated to make it look fabulous, darling, and should in no way be conceived as depicting reality. Which ultimately amounts to nothing, as pretty much every photo would have to carry that tag.

I suppose a sort of shorthand rating system could be introduced, like "MA - mammaries augmented", and "MA15+ - mammaries augmented and smeared in sunscreen", and so on. But wouldn't the ad also need to declare whether this was done in pre- or post-production? Given the increase in male eating disorders - one in four cases now, apparently - one can only assume the regulations would also have to apply to male representation. "This ad is rated PG - pecs greased."

Surely the bigger picture here is not digital manipulation per se, but our culture's whole fixation with the body itself, real or not. There are bodies out there that don't need to be digitally altered to send shivers of insecurity down my spine.

Consider, for example, the "warts-and-all" photos of Jennifer Hawkins (left) published in *Marie Claire* recently. Are we to really believe that if "real" pictures are better for the average girl's self-esteem, that Jennifer Hawkins, aka Miss Universe, did anyone any more favours in that spread than Demi Moore with her famously artificial additives?

I drove behind a bus yesterday with a huge ad on the back for a new fragrance by Sarah Jessica Parker. She looked attractive, appealing, inviting, and every bit as real as Jessica Rabbit. I'm quite certain I don't need a disclaimer to tell me that, one way or the other, the image on this bus and the real SJP are two very different things. After all, I've seen the stars without their make-up editions of *Who Weekly*. Although those photos are probably manipulated to make her look worse.

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